SAE

Supervised Agricultural Experience

Tips on Writing Press Releases

SAE projects are great success stories that often go untold. From a public relations perspective, this is a golden opportunity to promote the hands-on experience and career development activities created by SAEs through agricultural education. Sharing SAE achievement with the public is the best endorsement for young people in agriculture, your agriculture program and agricultural education; so let the stories be told.

When to Write a Press Release

A press release is an effective way to capture and distribute "newsworthy" information to reporters, editors and news directors. Ask yourself; *"Is this story or event something that news people and potential audiences will find interesting? Will the story promote SAEs, FFA and agricultural education in an exciting, yet factual manner?"* If the answer is yes, you've got a solid idea that warrants a press release. A few examples of SAE story ideas include:

- When a student receives local, state or national recognition for his/her SAE involvement.
- When a student has contributed to the community via his/her SAE.
- When a student SAE project provides goods or services to the local area (a new business).
- When students host a government official to promote SAE/FFA/Ag Ed.
- When students conduct a fundraising event to support SAEs or chapter projects.

Where to Send a Press Release

When evaluating where to send a press release, consider the relevance of the news to the potential audience. Who is going to be most interested in reading or hearing about your news, and how can you reach them? In most cases, SAE-related stories will have a local angle or will generate interest among agriculture-related publications and/or broadcasts in your state.

Following are a few things to consider when working with media representatives:

- **Identify media outlets based on content** of the press release. These may include newspapers, agriculture trade publications, association newsletters, radio and TV broadcast media, cable shows and Web-based news sites. Only send the release to pertinent news outlets.

- **Identify print reporters and editors and radio/TV news directors** who will receive the press release. The chances of your release being used increase significantly if you show you've done your homework by sending it to the right person. Also find out how they like to receive the release. Some prefer e-mail, while others may prefer a fax.

- **Create media lists** to have on file ready to use whenever you have news. You may want to create one master media list or have several categorized lists. Regardless, a media list should include the contact

name, title, organization, address, telephone and fax numbers and, if possible, an e-mail address. Media lists should also be updated on a regular basis.

- •**Build relationships with news people** as time and opportunities allow. Invite local news people to observe SAE programs or attend chapter functions. Or, set up short meetings with the local paper or radio/TV station, so news people are familiar with FFA, agricultural education and SAEs. This will greatly improve your ability to generate news coverage.

How to Write a Press Release

Writing a press release is comparable to assembling a puzzle. Once you have all the pieces, you'll be able to draft a well-written, interesting and informative press release. The large pieces encompass the five W's of your subject - **Who? What? When? Where? Why (or How)?**

- **Who** is the story about? In most cases, this is the most important W for the intended audience. It immediately generates interest and is a natural starting point for a press release.

- **What** happened? Did it happen to someone or something? The "What" almost always involves a verb. Something is happening, will happen or did happen.

- **When** did the event happen and is the press release timely? **Always** provide stories that are current or as close to the date being reported as possible. If it is an award announcement, distribute the press release within a week of the event or sooner. If the release is about a fundraising project, send it out at the beginning of the effort, not a few weeks before it is over.

- **Where** does the story take place, or where did the event happen? The "Where" is especially important for local news. Press releases that are close to home or involve someone close to home have the most impact.

- **Why** or **How** did this happen? Think of this as an explanation of the story. What does the reader need to know to understand why something happened or how an SAE works? If the press release requests action from the reader, let them know how they can become involved.

After answering these questions, the content "pieces" of the press release can be put together. Think of the press release structure as an inverted pyramid, beginning with the most important news and ending with the least important. All of the critical information needs to be summarized up front in a compelling lead with the supporting information in the following paragraphs. Keep in mind, a reporter or editor may have to shorten the story. With key information up front, you don't have to worry about anything important being eliminated. Use journalist style (see handout in this section) and keep the language in the press release simple. Do not use too many adjectives or fancy words and focus on the facts. **Double and triple check your spelling, grammar and punctuation**. Spell check may lead you astray!

Once you know what you want to say, the final piece of the puzzle involves putting the information in an acceptable format. This will make your press release look professional and will **greatly** improve your chances of the press release being used in some capacity. If a news person decides to run your story, you can expect that part or all of the information will be used, sometimes verbatim. They may also call you for more information or request an interview.

10 Formatting Guidelines

1. Print all pages of the press release on official letterhead. If you don't have any, create some.
2. Type "PRESS RELEASE" or "NEWS RELEASE" centered in bold at the top of the page.
3. List the contact person's name in the left margin with contact information written underneath.
4. If the story is "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," type the information in the left margin directly above the title. This is an optional place for the release date *(see note below)*.
5. The headline/title should be centered and in bold. Make it brief, but compelling.
6. The dateline (city, state, date) followed by a dash begins the body of the release.
7. A press release is generally one or two pages in length; rarely should it be longer.
8. Use a basic font (Arial, Times New Roman), double-spaced with 1.5 to 2-inch margins.
9. The second page should read "Page Two" in the upper right-hand or left-hand corner.
10. Use three "#" symbols centered in a row "###" to indicate the end of the release.

Notes on Release Date:

If the release is not for Immediate Release, Type the words "Release after:" and the date when you want the information to be available to the public.

If you include the date with "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" or "Release after;" you do not have to put it in the dateline. In this case (City, State) is fine.

SEE THE HANDOUT ON JOURNALIST STYLE FOR IMPORTANT GUIDELINES TO ASSIST YOU WITH NEWS WRITING.

Print the press release on official letterhead.

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Name
             Phone number
             E-mail (if desired)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or Release after:
Date (Month, Day, Year)

Write a Short Headline with Impact

(City, State) – The lead paragraph covers the five W's of the story, presenting the most important information to your readers first. This is where you "sell" the story to your reader.

   The body of the release should support the lead paragraph with additional facts, data, quotes, etc. A quote is a great way to personalize the release and add flavor. The body of the release should encompass no more than two pages. Words are valuable in journalism; use them wisely.

   Your last paragraph should provide a brief summary of any additional details. If the release demands action by the audience, this is the place to re-emphasize how they can take action, who they can call, phone numbers, etc.

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